DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 481 465 HE 036 255

TITLE	Widening Participation Funded Projects. End of Programme Report.
INSTITUTION	Higher Education Funding Council for England, Bristol.
REPORT NO	HEFCE-R-2003/40
PUB DATE	2003-08-00
NOTE	24p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Higher Education Funding Council for England, Northavon House, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol, BS16 1 QD England. Tel: 0119-931-7317; Fax: 0117-931-7203; Web site: http://www.hefce.ac.uk.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	*Access to Education; Diversity (Faculty); *Diversity (Institutional); Diversity (Student); *Financial Support; *Higher Education; *Program Effectiveness; *Student Participation
IDENTIFIERS	*Higher Education Funding Council for England

ABSTRACT

The Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Learning and Skills Council have provided funding between 2000 and 2003 for 81 projects aimed at widening participation in higher education. This document provides an overview of the outcomes of this initiative and lists the funding received by institutions. It also provides some examples of good practice. Overall, the widening participation projects were successful in having a significant impact on institutions and target groups. The program has encouraged collaboration between institutions, including those who consider themselves to be competitors. Good project management and adequate staffing have been key to the successful meeting of targets. Two appendixes list the institutions and provide examples of good practice. (SLD)

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ED 481 465

August 2003/40
Special initiative
Report on funded projects
This report is for information only

HEFCE and the LSC have provided funding from 2000 to 2003 for 81 widening participation projects. This document provides an overview of the outcomes of this initiative, and lists the funding received by institutions. It also provides some examples of good practice.

Widening participation funded projects

End of programme report

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Widening participation funded projects
End of programme report

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions Heads of HEFCE-funded further education colleges Heads of universities in Northern Ireland
Of interest to those responsible for	Widening participation
Reference	2003/**40**
Publication date	August 2003
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Executive summary

Purpose

1. In HEFCE 99/33, published in May 1999, we asked higher education institutions and further education colleges to submit plans for collaborative projects aimed at widening participation in higher education. We requested initial statements from higher education institutions of their strategies for widening participation, which we then monitored through each institution's annual operating statements.

2. This document provides an overview of the third annual monitoring reports and the final evaluation reports, reporting on lessons learned and action taken as a result. It also provides an overview of the programme and the wider lessons learned.

Key points

3. Overall the widening participation projects undertaken by institutions were successful in having a significant impact on institutions and on target groups.

4. The programme has encouraged collaboration between institutions, including those considering themselves to be competitors.

5. Good project management and adequate staffing have been key to the successful meeting of targets.

6. Projects have been most successful where they had clearly defined objectives and targets.

7. The Learning and Skills Council will shortly publish a similar report focusing on the projects led by further education colleges. For information please contact Paul Smith (paul.smith@lsc.gov.uk).

Action required

8. None: this report is for information.

Background

9. We have a long-standing policy to promote widening access and participation. Since our inception in 1992, we have supported a range of initiatives to encourage access and participation. Initially these were aimed at ethnic minority groups, students with special needs and students with disabilities. These initiatives were often only one or two years in duration and focused on individual institutions.

10. As part of the commitment to making widening participation (WP) a mainstream activity, we encouraged the 'old' universities to 'mainstream' work which had previously been funded separately, bringing it into the administrative, quality assurance and funding frames used for other higher education activity. This raised concerns within the higher education (HE) sector that some valuable work could not easily be mainstreamed, and that some important activity, particularly in the areas of Liberal Adult Education and WP, might be inadvertently damaged. In response, we agreed in 1995 to create a competitive fund to which institutions could bid for resources for work in both these fields. This Non Award-Bearing Continuing Education (NABCE) programme was open to both old and 'new' (post-1992) universities.

11. Following the publication of the Dearing report and the change of government in 1997, there was an enhanced commitment to WP. Our policy developed three major strands:

- the introduction of supplementary funding to institutions, mainly to recognise the additional extra costs of recruiting and supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds (often called the 'postcode premium')
- a special initiative in the field of disability
- a special initiative to support partnerships at a regional level to widen participation more generally.

12. This document only deals with the last of these. Partly as a result of lessons learned from the NABCE programme, the focus shifted towards developing partnerships between institutions, as opposed to institutions acting individually. This initiative developed over the following four years as explained below.

a. In 1998, £1.5 million was divided between the English regions to fund 25 pilot projects, initially for calendar year 1999. (HEFCE 99/07, 'Widening participation: special funding programme 1998-99', announced details). We stated that this was the first stage of a longer-term initiative to widen participation to higher education for under-represented groups.

b. In January 1999, we agreed to continue to fund the programme, with a significantly enhanced level of funding. We then allocated £5.5 million for three years to support a programme to enhance partnerships between higher education institutions (HEIs) and other organisations, to support new activity and to disseminate and embed good practice (HEFCE 99/33). Of this funding, £0.5 million each year was retained – partly for national projects but mainly to support national co-ordination, project support and dissemination. This money funded the work of the Action on Access (AoA) team, which carried out these tasks. We also contributed a further £2 million per year for three years to a joint programme with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC, formerly the Further Education Funding Council). The LSC matched the £2 million contribution, initially for one year, though it continued this in each of the following years. We published the call for bids in HEFCE 99/33, and regional seminars were held in May 1999 for HEIs and further education colleges (FECs). The seminars discussed regional priorities to be addressed by the programme.

13. We encouraged institutions to work in partnership and to present single integrated applications to both HEFCE and LSC funds where possible. Neither funding council sought to prescribe the nature of the activity to be supported, either in development of partnerships or in dissemination and embedding of good practice. We provided guidance on the types of activity eligible for support, including development of summer schools; activities to increase participation by under-represented groups; staff development activities; building credit frameworks and strengthening curricular pathways; developing student mentoring schemes; and enhancing information, advice and guidance. We wished this initiative to complement institutional activity, to allow for partnership working which would not be easily developed through institutional funding streams and to encourage innovation and the sharing of good practice.

14. Funding by HEFCE and the LSC totalled £27.4 million between 2000 and 2002. The £0.4 million was allocated to a project that was approved after the initial allocations, which was funded from the HEFCE flexibility margin. Annex A lists the payments to individual projects. Some projects altered their initial plans, and some finished before the end of the initiative, so a small amount of the allocated funding was not distributed. There was also a small amount of unallocated funding.

15. HEFCE and the LSC supported 71 projects initially, covering all nine English regions. In subsequent years we supported a number of new projects, while others formed new collaborative ventures through the merger of existing projects. In total, between 2000 and 2002, 81 projects were funded, of which FECs led 23.

16. When we first established the initiative in 1998, we allocated funding to regions so that institutions were bidding for regional rather than national funds. This was the first such initiative to be managed in this way. Since we had no prior mechanisms for do this, we established a Regional Advisory Network (RAN) in each region, which had representatives from the Government Office, Regional Development Agency, and the regional office of the Further Education Funding Council. The HEFCE regional consultant acted as chair. The relevant AoA regional adviser joined the RAN as an observer. These RANs initially agreed the priorities for each region proposed by the regional seminars, assessed the bids, selected the projects for funding and monitored the projects. They received the annual monitoring reports, and advised the two funding councils on funding issues. The general outcomes of the RANs were reported to the National Advisory Panel after each annual round of monitoring. The final meetings of the RANs were held in January/February 2003; they considered the 2002 annual monitoring reports and the project final evaluation reports.

17. This document provides an overview of the third (2002) annual monitoring reports and the final evaluation reports, reporting on the lessons learned and action taken as a result. It also provides an overview of the programme and the wider lessons learned.

Overview of the end of project evaluation reports

18. We asked projects of more than one-year's duration to provide an evaluation report upon completion of their work. In the majority of cases this was 31 December 2002, but seven projects were granted extensions (six to March 2003 and, the one that was approved late, to August 2003).

19. In June 2002, HEFCE and the LSC issued guidance on the broad areas that we expected the reports to cover, but we encouraged projects to provide a more contemplative and descriptive document than the annual monitoring return. The issues we suggested for inclusion were an overview of the project, overall achievements and impact of the project on the key target groups, lessons learned, effectiveness of the management structure, and an evaluation of the project activities with evidence of quantitative and qualitative outcomes. We were also concerned to learn about unanticipated positive outcomes and for examples of activities that had not been successful.

20. Overall, the quality of the reports was disappointing. Rather than providing a genuinely evaluative approach, they tended to provide an overview monitoring report, reporting on activities carried out over the whole life of the project with little evaluation of the effectiveness of the work and the impact on institutional behaviour, target groups and the larger policy aims. The themes that are explored below are, therefore, an overview of the lessons drawn from the programme by the project teams themselves. These are supplemented by general comments from HEFCE regional consultants and AoA who supported the projects throughout and advised the RANs and HEFCE/LSC officers. Annex B provides examples of projects that exhibited good practice.

Infrastructure and management

Partnership

21. A key feature of the WP initiative was that the bids had to be submitted by a lead organisation on behalf of a partnership. Partnership is seen as key to success in this area of working, for three main reasons:

- institutions and practitioners can learn from each other
- widening participation depends on partnerships between higher education, further education, schools and communities
- when working with disadvantaged communities, competition among institutions is counter-productive; it leads to duplication, overlap and waste of resources, and often creates confusion among the target communities.

22. The one-year programme in 1999 had been designed to support the development of partnerships and the mapping of existing provision; the subsequent funding was designed to build on this initial work. This was highly successful in the South-West and the North-East, leading spontaneously to the formation of region-wide partnerships or sub-regional partnerships which provided the basis for the main initiative. In other regions, the partnership formation was less successful for a variety of reasons, and meant that the main initiative took longer to become established. In some cases, different partnerships within a region had poor relationships. In some cases, partnerships did not arise spontaneously among partners but had to be facilitated by Council officers. In others, pre-existing tensions between institutions meant that the partnerships, though they may well have worked well on the ground, did not have real institutional support or commitment at a high level.

23. Project reports noted that it was important to recognise the different organisational structures in partner institutions. Comprehensive partnership agreements, and clear lines of accountability within and between the partners, were vital to the success of the projects. It was also important to share clear communication strategies prior to the commencement of work. Where this had not been

transparent, the projects reported difficulties in relation to the complexity and diversity of partner organisations. This had the effect of slowing progress at times, and led to operational problems.

24. Some project reports suggested that funding was insufficient to support a complex partnership arrangement or a wide range of activities. The projects themselves reported that three-year funding was an improvement over shorter initiatives. In some regions the outcome of the bidding process was that there were a number of small projects for which the infrastructural costs of partnership working were relatively high. Many of the projects did not build on the earlier work but were new following the increase in funding; this meant that the policy aim of establishing partnerships in the first year, with the main initiative using this infrastructure, was not always achieved.

25. The evidence shows that effective partnership was key to project success. Partnerships worked best when there was clear institutional commitment, as shown by senior management involvement, and where the activity was well connected to each institution's own WP policy and practice. We have evidence that where this happened, there was a synergistic relationship between the work of the projects and the development of institutional policy and practice.

Institutional commitment and co-operation

26. Involvement of senior management from partner institutions was crucial in raising awareness of the projects within institutions, as well as emphasising the importance of the widening participation agenda regionally. There was also a clear need for support at senior manager level for activities to become embedded within institutions.

27. The projects found that it was necessary to co-ordinate HE planning in a more systematic way to avoid duplication of effort between the partner institutions. This led to a more synchronised approach, for example in the provision of information, advice and guidance to potential students. The time committed to engendering trust between the partners has been beneficial in diminishing any perceived threats of competition. The most successful events were often those where local partners – especially colleges, community organisations and local providers – were closely involved in the organisation and promotion of an event to their users.

Project management

28. An issue identified by a number of the RANs was the lack of effective project management. In many cases project management was delegated to the project workers who, while often highly expert in WP, often had little experience in project management. Where they were new to the organisation, they had little or no prior knowledge of the management structures and financial management systems, and it was often difficult for the RANs to glean accurate information in the monitoring reports. AoA members had to provide support and advice in project management, but even with this support some projects did not report their outcomes clearly.

29. In some cases, project managers were themselves apparently unable to gather information from university or college finance departments. This again meant that the monitoring reports were difficult for us to use, and required follow-up activity by Council officers and/or the AoA regional adviser.

Funding issues

30. HEIs welcomed the opportunity to collaborate fully with FECs that provision of funding from both HEFCE and LSC offered. Notwithstanding this, there were disadvantages in the way the joint HEFCE/LSC fund operated. Initially, we hoped to treat HEFCE and LSC funds as a single joint fund. In the event, because LSC funds were only approved on an annual basis and because they needed to be allocated to an organisation already in receipt of LSC funding, this was not possible. This meant that it had to be managed as two separate funds, which was found to be unhelpful to most projects. Some projects received funds from only one funder, others received a combination. The duality of reporting arrangements that the joint funding necessitated was not a good use of time, particularly in small projects. It was suggested that providing funds through a single channel would be most beneficial, and this approach has been adopted for the financial arrangements of Aimhigher: P4P.

31. In the South-West and the North-East regions a single region-wide approach to funding was taken. The projects reported that there were advantages in being region-wide, as this meant that a comprehensive approach could be taken and that funds could be moved between project elements to accommodate changing circumstances. Again, this approach has been adopted for Aimhigher: P4P funding.

32. There was concern in at least one region that resources were not always well integrated with other funding, either institutional funding or other project funding, so that it was not always clear which funding stream was funding which activity.

Focus

33. RAN members believe that projects achieved most when they had sharp objectives focusing on tangible outcomes, supported by a robust management structure. Well-constructed targets meant that the projects were more able to communicate their aims and enthuse the target groups and partner agencies. In some cases, projects did not develop this kind of focus in the beginning; advice from the RANs and AoA, as well as attendance at staff development events organised within regions and nationally, had a significant impact.

34. While projects that spanned large regional areas found it easier to manage the funding, there was a danger that these projects lacked focus. One effective approach to managing wide-ranging activities was the use of themes, particularly where each partner institution took the lead for a theme and played to its existing strengths, rather than creating activities from scratch. This worked best when it was combined with regional co-ordination and sharing of good practice. This brought the benefits of scale with the benefits of focus.

35. In regions where this was not the pattern, there were some highly successful small projects, which achieved their aims and produced interesting results. These projects did, however, often find it more difficult to share good practice and to embed the work in subsequent institutional practice. In some regions, practitioner networks, either newly developed or based on the networks developed during the NABCE initiative, assisted in providing mutual support and helped smaller projects address issues of dissemination and embedding.

Staffing issues

36. Many of the projects experienced staffing difficulties, both at the outset and during the life of the project. Recruitment difficulties often led to delays in the commencement of activities, and the slippage took time to absorb. Loss of key staff during the project, through illness or resignation, often meant that projects slipped behind schedule while replacement staff were appointed, leading to loss of momentum until key contacts were re-established. Some projects experienced problems in recruiting staff with the skills and expertise to engage with the target groups, which made it difficult to maintain a staff base. The projects welcomed the opportunities offered to staff to develop their expertise in a range of skills that provided additional benefits both to the institutions in which the staff were based and to the individuals themselves. AoA played a key role in supporting project staff experiencing difficulties.

37. Obviously, quality of staff varied and, in some cases, the need to urgently fill vacancies led to inappropriate staff being appointed. In a number of cases, project staff were seconded from within the partner bodies and as a result were familiar with institutional and regional practices and were able to be effective more quickly. In some cases, further education (FE) staff were seconded into HEIs, and this proved particularly effective in changing perceptions with the HEIs. Seconded staff were also less likely to leave the project, and greater stability of activity and reporting ensued.

38. Towards the end of the programme, the projects experienced significant staffing problems as a result of the uncertainty surrounding continuation funding. Staff appointed on contracts considered moving on as much as 12 months before completion of the projects, resulting in problems of continuity and, in some cases, restricting further development work. Though the two funding councils did create a transition fund to bridge the gap between the end of this initiative in December 2002 and the start of Aimhigher: P4P in April 2003, this did not overcome this difficulty and a number of projects lost staff during the final few months. This undoubtedly contributed to the poor quality of the evaluation reports. The most effective projects maintained consistency of staff but there was evidence to suggest that insufficient attention was given to succession planning and sustainability.

39. These problems are inherent in short-term funding, and the projects achieved a great deal and innovated in a number of ways in spite of them. We are hopeful that with Aimhigher: P4P, which is initially funded for three years, we will secure a consistent stream of funding over a longer period. In late 2003 or early 2004, we will also be asking institutions, as a condition of grant, to submit revised institutional WP strategies which are designed to complement Aimhigher: P4P activity. These will need to be submitted in July 2004, by which time Aimhigher: P4P will be well established. We thus expect much more coherence between regional collaborative outreach activity and institutional strategies.

Work with other partner agencies

40. A central feature of the WP special initiative was that HEIs and FECs should work together. Many of the projects went beyond this and engaged with other partner agencies. The links that have been developed reflect regional, sub-regional and local relationships, and include community groups, the voluntary sector, employers, schools and, in the later stages of the projects, Excellence Challenge co-ordinators.

41. Collaboration with these groups has not been without its difficulties, and the pressure of time on many staff in these organisations is significant. The projects reported that the lack of time available from teachers limited the progress anticipated. The range of initiatives that require commitment from schools meant that they were often not able to take up the opportunities offered to them by the regional projects. Furthermore, the projects suggested that the attitude of teachers to students' abilities has proved to be difficult to overcome in some instances. They cited examples in which, while Excellence Challenge co-ordinators were actively involved in matching students to project activities and events, the schools did not always supply the right target group, putting forward pupils who would do best instead of those most in need. The projects learned that further time is needed to work with schools and other partner agencies to explain the purpose of WP and the nature of the target groups and, in some cases, to raise their awareness of the changes that have taken place in higher education.

42. Changing the perceptions of the target groups has been challenging, particularly where pupils had low aspirations or expectations from higher education. However, community groups have played a key part in facilitating change. The links developed with community groups have demonstrated that pupils often have poor study and literacy skills, which influences the rate of progression from further education to higher education courses. The projects recognised that this issue needs to be addressed through the development of more widening participation activities. It was found that institutional partners did not always regard community-based widening participation activities as mainstream work. This was possibly because the community would feel the impact in the first instance, rather than seeing immediate results through increased participation at FECs or HEIs.

43. By enlisting the expertise of established networks, such as youth workers and other key people in the community, the projects acknowledged that collaboration with these networks has been vital in gaining access to target groups and securing credibility. This has been a successful strategy for engaging with some minority ethnic communities, especially young Bangladeshi people and Bangladeshi females, and courses have been adapted to allow students to learn in their own community setting and close to home (which was particularly relevant to some minority ethnic groups).

44. Role models play an important part in an individual's expectations and aspirations, and family awareness is crucial to raising aspirations. Projects that involved the creation of mentoring schemes and events that included student ambassadors saw the extended effect of promoting the benefits of learning across generations. Projects noted that institutions were increasingly recruited children of successful mature students and/or parents of successful young people.

45. Another issue that affected work with partner agencies, was that this special initiative took place at a time of considerable policy change, with a number of other initiatives being introduced by other agencies during the life of the projects. For example, the joint WP fund had a requirement that projects be endorsed by their local Lifelong Learning Partnership, as they were called in 1999. During the WP programme the nature and role of these partnerships changed and they were subject to a major review by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) which meant that working with some of them was made more difficult. A further example was Excellence Challenge, which started during 2001; since it operated in only parts of the country, this government initiative added complexity for projects that sought to work across a region or sub-region.

Embedding and cultural change

46. Any programme designed to facilitate institutional change will take time to reach fruition, and the projects recognised that activities devised to raise the profile of higher education, increase aspiration and build confidence in the target groups would not lead to quick results in terms of actual entry to HE. The projects have often challenged deeply embedded institutional traditions and cultures. Institutions take time to adapt and develop new procedures, and the projects have invested a considerable amount of energy to ensure that improved practices and attitudes have been reflected within institutional strategies.

47. The projects received feedback from students, which highlighted the need to offer flexible provision in local venues backed by learning adviser support. The projects concluded that HE providers should offer modules or complete undergraduate awards in more accessible community venues, rather than in main campus sites. This type of provision would appeal to learners in rural areas who had experienced barriers in accessing local provision, as well as mature, home-based HE students. This kind of provision is often not within the normal structures of HEIs (though it is more familiar to the FE sector) and may require significant investment and, more importantly, significant changes in attitudes within HEIs and in their work with partners.

48. Other institutional changes recommended by the projects included the need for HEIs to be more explicit about their academic requirements and the support available to their increasingly diverse body of students. The projects learned lessons about the importance of explicit progression routes, which go beyond facilitating entry and recognise that HEIs need to adapt in order to meet the varying needs of a range of students. The projects also stated the importance of using staff who had experience of working both in the community and higher education.

49. In developing provision to attract the target groups, the projects recognised that institutions would need to address the complexities of funding criteria to be flexible enough to accommodate students' needs, yet also be eligible to receive funding support from either the LSC or HEFCE. One project noted that inconsistencies in accreditation of short course provision were a deterrent to promoting the benefits of learning. The project concluded that formally assigning credit to short courses would be a useful development, particularly if extended into a national scheme.

50. Many of the regional projects have undertaken extensive research into student progression, leading to the development of extensive data and statistical tools with widespread uses. Many projects reported that the data have been used within their institutions to reveal what influences participation in and progression to higher education, and in suggesting ways to forecast future subject demand and participation rates. This has influenced the development of staff training materials and literature for target groups. However, the projects observed that they would have benefited from having more detailed data available at the outset (for example, POLAR data). They have carried out considerable research at their own expense, and the sharing of information could have avoided duplication.

Monitoring and evaluation

51. One lesson learned from the projects was the need to establish evaluation methodologies and procedures at the outset of the venture. A clear understanding of what was meant by evaluation should be set out early in the planning process. Evaluation strategies should be developed to enable students to be tracked throughout the project, and research should be conducted with students,

tutors and teachers about the perceived benefits of the projects. However, tracking students through different sectors of the education system is often problematical.

52. The evaluation reports bear witness to the projects' lack of preparedness to provide full evaluation information, to include both quantitative and qualitative data to assess the impact made on the target groups and partner agencies as a result of the projects' activities. Most provided a narrative that described the processes well, but provided little evidence that the real outcomes had been assessed. Some projects had engaged external evaluators but, even here, the results still focused largely on internal processes. Some notable exceptions produced useful evaluative information by developing relatively robust student tracking systems at the outset, or by conducting cross-regional peer review.

Lessons learned

53. Throughout the WP initiative, AoA provided support to the projects and to HEFCE and LSC. In each annual monitoring report, we asked for feedback on the contribution made by AoA, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. From the point of view of the two funding councils the value of a co-ordination team in supporting this initiative was substantial. One HEFCE regional consultant commented:

> 'Our A on A adviser played a key role throughout. She moved easily between the projects and HEFCE and the RAN, commanding respect wherever she went. She was not afraid of passing on "difficult" messages (which some projects responded to better than others, depending on their levels of confidence, commitment and maturity). Without [her], we'd all have been in much more difficulty and the projects would have achieved significantly less.'

54. There have been many examples of good practice, which have had a significant impact on institutional practice and within the target communities. Examples are at Annex B. It is much more difficult to produce hard data on the impact of the special initiative. The most recent performance indicators issued by HEFCE used 2000 entrants; it is therefore too early to assess any possible impact of the special initiative on progression to and retention in higher education.

55. The WP regional projects were encouraged to take innovative approaches to address the remit of the programme. The projects had to evolve as it became clear which strands yielded the most success, while others were revised or abandoned. As a result, they found it hard to know what should be measured during the projects, and measures of performance were not readily available.

56. The programme encouraged collaboration between institutions that historically might have considered themselves to be competitors. Collaboration worked best between institutions that had utilised existing regional relationships to develop and extend the widening participation activities within their institutions. Projects that were based on enforced partnership arrangements, with little or no former history of collaboration, found it harder to overcome management and operational differences and, in some cases, decided to disband the partnership and operate independently.

57. Projects worked best when they were built upon partner institutions' strategic priorities. This made it easier to advocate the benefits of activities being invested in by the institutions, and facilitated the embedding of the projects' gains into institutional strategies, and in turn influenced culture change. Likewise, projects with clearly defined objectives and a good focus often made a greater impact that those with wide-ranging strands, which tended to spread the activity too thinly.

58. The most successful projects had robust management structures that included support from senior staff from the partner institutions. This support was vital to add credibility to the work of the projects, and to ensure that their successes were embedded in institutional strategies.

59. Projects have enjoyed more success when they have had consistency in staffing, and where institutions have secured staff with the skills and expertise to manage programmes such as this. Secondment of existing staff appears to be more effective than employing project workers. This is especially true of projects with short-term funding. The projects experienced considerable difficulties with staff turnover because of uncertainties surrounding the continuation of funding in the transition to Aimhigher: P4P.

60. Evidence suggests that targeted staff development needed to be provided to project managers and development workers, addressing areas such as project management techniques, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and dissemination strategies. AoA was able to provide valuable advice on these areas, to supplement that being provided by the partnerships themselves. However, more extensive training would have been beneficial to some projects, particularly where staff had joined part-way through the programme and had less support from their institutions to get up to speed. It would have been helpful if AoA had been available from the beginning of the initiative to undertake staff development at the outset.

61. Evaluation is most effective when it is a continuous process, with criteria for measuring success being established at the outset. More support could have been provided to the projects on scoping out clearly what they wished to achieve from the programme, as well as developing a sound understanding of what is meant by evaluation. This is an area that many projects found difficult, and additional support to help them to develop evaluation strategies would have been helpful. We have built this into the requirements for AimHigher:P4P funding.

62. The support of the AoA team has been crucial. This has been true both of the individual support to the projects, but also of the national support the team provided through information, advice and guidance. The team provided an essential conduit between the projects, the two funding councils and the Regional Advisory Networks. The projects would have achieved significantly less without the support of the team.

National themes

63. Some of the activities do not have a specific regional focus but would benefit from being disseminated through a national scheme. This includes opportunities to work more closely with other groups (such as Regional Development Agencies), extending our summer schools programme to make links with industry, supporting teachers in schools or colleges, and good practice noted in many of the projects.

Next steps

64. We learned a great deal from the special initiative and many of these lessons have been incorporated into the design of Aimhigher: P4P. We believe that further good practice can be identified for future WP projects. AoA is looking at the final monitoring and the evaluation reports, and is looking in detail at some areas that seemed to have reasonable quantitative evidence. AoA

will interrogate the evidence, through visits to the institutions that led on the projects, to determine what further quantitative data can be revealed about their impact. The team will also seek to disseminate good practice which they are uncovering in regional and sub-regional evaluation.

Annex A

Summary of funding

HEFCE and the LSC provided funding from 2000 to 2003 for 81 widening participation projects. These are listed below. The figures below are subject to change following final reconciliation of project funding.

Region	Name of lead institution	Total HEFCE funding	Total LSC funding	Total funding
East	University of Hertfordshire	£281,750	£0	£281,750
East	University of Luton	£85,750	£0	£85,750
East	Anglia Polytechnic University	£913,500	£186,000	£1,099,500
East	Barnfield College	£0	£90,000	£90,000
East	West Herts College	£0	£90,000	£90,000
EM	University of Derby	£500,646	£99,354	£600,000
EM	University College, Northampton	£263,058	£0	£263,058
EM	Loughborough University	£72,750	£0	£72,750
EM	Loughborough University	£36,545	£0	£36,545
EM	University of Lincoln	£312,885	£0	£312,885
EM	University of Leicester	£402,150	£0	£402,150
EM	North Lincolnshire College	£0	£190,000	£190,000
EM	Leicester College	£0	£93,764	£93,764
London	University of Westminster	£150,000	£0	£150,000
London	Birkbeck College	£195,622	£0	£195,622
London	Kingston University	£240,000	£0	£240,000
London	University of East London	£239,998	£0	£239,998
London	Imperial College	£143,210	£0	£143,210
London	The London Institute	£198,275	£0	£198,275
London	University of North London	£208,671	£0	£208,671
London	University of North London	£180,000	£0	£180,000
London	The Royal Veterinary College	£221,622	£0	£221,622
London	Ravensbourne College	£73,707	£0	£73,707
London	Middlesex University	£291,000	£0	£291,000
London	Queen Mary & Westfield College	£240,000	£0	£240,000
London	South Bank University	£232,000	£0	£232,000
London	Greenwich College	£0	£355,000	£355,000
London	Havering College of Further and Higher Education	£0	£160,000	£160,000
NE	University of Durham	£142,500	£142,500	£285,000
NE	University of Newcastle upon Tyne on behalf of Universities for the North East	£1,713,000	£0	£1,713,000
NE	University of Teesside and Middlesbrough College	£142,500	£142,500	£285,000
NE	Northumberland College	£142,500	£142,500	£285,000
NE	Newcastle College	£258,000	£258,000	£516,000
NW	Bolton Institute	£414,000	£0	£414,000
NW	Cumbria College of Art & Design	£135,000	£0	£135,000

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Region	Name of lead institution	Total HEFCE funding	Total LSC funding	Total funding
NW	Cumbria College of Art & Design	£89,000	£0	£89,000
NW	Edge Hill College of Higher Education	£1,087,500	£27,500	£1,115,000
NW	Liverpool University	£880,000	£384,000	£1,264,000
NW	Manchester Metropolitan University	£702,000	£0	£702,000
NW	University of Manchester	£435,000	£15,000	£450,000
NW	The Open University in the North West	£260,000	£0	£260,000
NW	University of Salford	£30,000	£0	£30,000
NW	Chester College	£130,000	£193,000	£323,000
NW	University of Central Lancashire	£5,883	£0	£5,883
NW	Edge Hill College of Higher Education	£35,000	£0	£35,000
NW	Accrington and Rossendale College	£0	£52,000	£52,000
NW	Accrington and Rossendale College	£0	£48,000	£48,000
NW	Accrington and Rossendale College	£0	£200,000	£200,000
NW	Preston College	£0	£48,000	£48,000
NW	Wigan and Leigh College	£0	£190,000	£190,000
NW	Macclesfield	£0	£0	£0
NW	Lakes College – West Cumbria	£0	£45,000	£45,000
SE	University of Brighton	£407,700	£0	£407,700
SE	University of Surrey	£239,000	£0	£239,000
SE	University of Southampton	£268,667	£0	£268,667
SE	University of Kent	£346,578	£0	£346,578
SE	Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College	£319,000	£0	£319,000
SE	University of Portsmouth	£279,700	£0	£279,700
SE	CADISE	£226,154	£0	£226,154
SE	Sparsholt College	£0	£48,040	£48,040
SE	Canterbury College	£0	£50,000	£50,000
SE	Reading College of Art and Design	£0	£41,700	£41,700
SE	Abingdon College	£0	£244,000	£244,000
SW	University of West of England	£1,323,000	£378,000	£1,701,000
WM	Newman College of Higher Education	£105,000	£0	£105,000
WM	University of Wolverhampton	£321,000	£0	£321,000
WM	University of Wolverhampton	£714,336	£0	£714,336
WM	University of Birmingham	£288,000	£0	£288,000
WM	University of Birmingham	£154,500	£0	£154,500
WM	Staffordshire University	£223,000	£0	£223,000
WM	Aston University	£273,000	£0	£273,000
WM	Coventry University	£797,243	£0	£797,243
WM	North East Worcestershire College	£0	£97,350	£97,350
WM	Workers' Educational Association	£0	£152,460	£152,460
WM	Hereward College	£0	£150,266	£150,266
WM	Wolverhampton College	£0	£68,255	£68,255
Y&H	University of Leeds on behalf of YHUA	£2,157,000	£0	£2,157,000
Y&H	Leeds Metropolitan University	£135,000	£0	£135,000
Y&H	Sheffield Hallam University	£190,000	£0	£190,000

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Region	Name of lead institution	Total HEFCE funding	Total LSC funding	Total funding
Y&H	York St John College	£136,541	£0	£136,541
Y&H	Northern School of Contemporary Dance	£151,500	£0	£151,500
Y&H	University of Leeds	£27,177	£0	£27,177
Y&H	Leeds Metropolitan University	£126,000	£124,000	£250,000
Y&H	York College	£0	£90,000	£90,000
Y&H	Bradford College	£0	£125,000	£125,000
Y&H	Hull College	£0	£176,610	£176,610
Y&H	Barnsley College	£0	£85,590	£85,590
Y&H	Dewsbury College	£0	£122,500	£122,500
Y&H	Dewsbury College	£0	£150,000	£150,000
Y&H	Northern College	£0	£51,700	£51,700
	Payment from LSC to HEFCE toward joint fund		£326,438	£0
	Total	**£21,294,118**	**£5,307,589**	**£26,601,707**

Annex B

Examples of good practice

East of England

1. The Four Counties Group in the East of England is a collaborative partnership led by Anglia Polytechnic University, comprising eight HEIs and numerous FECs. The project was commended for its robust management structure, which had been consistently strong and showed evidence that all partners were engaged with the activities. This had enhanced the work between the different strands within the project, demonstrating a good interface between research and the practical components of the project. The work undertaken has led to the publication of a good practice booklet, and is being embedded into the work of Anglia Polytechnic University and its partners. Notable outcomes from the project included:

a. The research and development work led to the production of a database of HE student participation. Using this data, the project targeted outreach activities at young people in low socio-economic areas.

b. Outreach activities played a key role in the objectives of the Four Counties Group, and included the highly successful 'Children-into-University' scheme. The scheme offered a rolling programme of outreach activity across the region, with all children who participated in the annual three-day events being tracked over successive years of schooling. The children were also offered an opportunity to expand on their initial work and skills in after-school 'twilight' clubs held three times a year over the subsequent school years.

East Midlands

2. The Leicestershire project, led by the University of Leicester, targeted learners between 14 and 19 from under-represented groups, as well as establishing community group projects and networks, and parent groups working through initiatives such as Excellence in Cities. The project operated at a sub-regional level, with the three universities concentrating on distinct geographical areas but also leading on particular activities, with practitioners from each sharing lessons learned at steering group meetings. The project management group facilitated change through key strategic representation such as developing institutional widening participation strategies and staff development activities. This partnership worked well because project co-ordination was undertaken outside the three universities, which meant that the co-ordinator had an 'honest broker' role'. The structure involved the Leicester City Cluster, which played a large part in bringing together a range of initiatives and minimised duplication. There has been a strengthening of links between organisations, and there has been a significant impact in getting HE staff more closely involved in the WP agenda.

London

3. The South East London HE Participation Scheme (SELHEPS), led by South Bank University, built on the earlier pilot work to develop a successful sub-regional approach to conduct a research exercise based on the geodemographic profile of the SELHEPS cohort. The main achievements have been:

a. Creation of a 'Bonus scheme' to provide a range of HE facilities, activities and events for students in FE colleges and community groups across the partnership. Activities included short courses, taster days and individual workshops. 142 students were recruited to the scheme and evaluation showed

there were a high proportion of females, a wide ethnic mix and that 53 per cent came from the neighbourhoods with the lowest participation in HE.

b. A 'Pathways to Learning' programme was developed to include delivery at all partner HEIs and FECs, with sessions on raising aspirations, raising awareness of HE, study skills, UCAS preparation and advice and preparation for HE. Again there was a higher proportion of females and a good mix of ethnicity, and 54 per cent came from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds.

c. The collaborative partnership in the East and North-East of London, led by Queen Mary, University of London, built on the work established in the pilot project to tackle the barriers to participation of low aspirations and attainment. It aimed to do this by extending provision, improving guidance and advice, promoting institutional change and developing a student and community voice. The project has received positive feedback from its publications, and it suggested that there is a potential role for a region-wide publication to promote issues from institutional staff and students' perspectives. This could provide examples of good practice across regions, the UK and internationally to help set up working mechanisms to promote student retention and success, with messages from senior managers and policy makers.

d. The project led by London Metropolitan University brought together Excellence Challenge co-ordinators for each borough and assembled a steering group that provides a forum for sharing ideas and best practice. The project also developed a database of key staff contacts in each Local Education Authority (LEA). In addition, the project has managed to embed itself as a key part of the mainstream work of the LEAs. For instance, project reports have formed a major part of the Islington 14-19 Strategy Document. Within London there has been information-sharing and good practice, and there are parallels between the project and related schools programmes at other institutions. For instance, Middlesex University (Compact and Progression Agreement), Kingston University (establishing a new programme of schools activities) and University of Westminster (Focus on Higher Education Project, involving visits, talks and presentations and mentoring activities) are all involved in projects working with schools and colleges.

North-East

4. The Universities for the North East project, led by the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, incorporated proposals from the region's six universities, each addressing four generic themes. The strong regional partnership between the institutions has facilitated dissemination of good practice and the sharing of experience while allowing each institution to manage its own initiatives, develop its own partnerships and so maintain its own identity and respond to diverse needs throughout the region. The links that each partner institution had with its respective FE/HE project has enabled closer links to be made between all projects, with joint dissemination, publications and staff development. This will now be formalised and built upon under the arrangements emerging to take forward AimHigher: P4P.

5. The project was one of the few that undertook external evaluation. It engaged an external assessor in 2001 and took part in a reciprocal peer evaluation with the South-West WP project in 2002. This process ensured that the project incorporated the outcomes of the evaluation in its practice in an ongoing and deliberate fashion. The project organisers felt that the review with the South-West had been valuable, because each team had been able to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of its own project by viewing it from a fresh perspective.

6. The Access for Rural Communities project, led by Northumberland College, aimed to widen participation for people for whom access is difficult by virtue of rural isolation or the social and economic exclusion of their communities. The project benefited from significant commitment from the senior management team. It was commended for developing on-line HE foundation course modules in several scientific subjects. The project was outward-looking, as evidenced by its promotion activities to publicise specific activities, and in raising the profile of HE throughout Northumberland. The project demonstrated a sound alignment with Northumberland Learning and Skills Council's strategies.

North-West

7. The Lancashire Compact, led by Edge Hill College of Higher Education, was a sub-regional project covering the county of Lancashire. The overall aim was collectively to raise aspirations and awareness of HE among potential students and families from under-represented groups in order to increase progression opportunities. Secondary schools and colleges were selected on the basis of: an academic performance below the national benchmark; a high percentage of minority ethnic students; an identified Education Action Zone or regeneration zone in which compulsory education has been identified as a problem; or offering free school meals to over 35 per cent of pupils. The project had exceeded its original targets by three times, and it was commended on the good infrastructure that had allowed the project to accomplish this. The report provided a thoughtful and full evaluation, with detailed recommendations and learning points.

South-East

8. The Sussex Coastal Highway was a project led by the University of Brighton, with the University of Sussex and University College Chichester, which aimed to combat social exclusion by increasing participation in HE from five localised areas of coastal deprivation within communities that were relatively prosperous overall. The project identified reasons for under-representation, and provided sustained intervention to raise aspirations and attainment. The project was considered to be well managed, with genuine partnerships, and to have succeeded in identifying pupils with no family tradition of HE participation. Pupils, parents and teachers reported positively on their involvement and the beneficial impact of the project. The project benefited from having the chair of the steering group from the FE sector, and good links had been developed with adult education.

9. The project managed by the Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College aimed to enhance access to HE in three ways: by developing an accreditation programme; implementing a mentoring programme to motivate under-represented groups; and operating a fast track summer school programme for Asian women, long-term unemployed people, and people with disabilities. The project pursued innovative and challenging activities, particularly in relation to pupils with disabilities. The project had achieved closer links between the partner institutions, in particular with the four FECs involved – East Berkshire College, Berkshire College of Agriculture, Aylesbury College and Amersham & Wycombe College – as well as with their local communities and outside agencies (such as the Buckinghamshire Young People's University, the Mental Health Trust, NSPCC, Rayners Hedge Pain Control Clinic, and Millennium House – a Slough based hostel for young people estranged from their families). The project demonstrated good use of funding with impressive targets, and was a successful example of cross-regional working.

South-West

10. The South-West project included 12 HEIs and 39 FECs. It established a collaboration involving all HE and FE institutions in the region with other partners to tackle widening participation priorities. The project had a strong central management structure and a steering group that oversaw all 23 programme elements. The project used effective targets to identify under-represented groups, and focused strongly on them. With regard to evaluation and dissemination, nearly all the programme elements closely met aspects of the DfES's key priorities for widening participation and key skills, including: developing a flexible and challenging 14-19 phase of education; increasing and broadening participation in HE; developing the skills of the workforce, particularly the basic skills of some adults. The South-West project showed foresight in doing this.

West Midlands

11. The project was structured as a partnership of universities and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), since the WEA was the only region-wide FE provider. The aims of the project were to develop a West Midlands wide partnership of universities with the WEA, to map WEA access to HE curriculum against university courses, and to provide support and mentoring to WEA students moving into HE. The key target groups were adult learners who left school at 16, had limited opportunities for vocational training, who were employed in manual work or were unemployed, black students, students with disabilities, or women in second chance/access education. A major outcome of the project has been the development of more formal links with eight universities across the West Midlands, and a mapping exercise revealed the need to develop more structured progression routes within the WEA to university certificate, degree and diploma courses.

12. Newman College developed a project which aimed to recognise and support the learning experiences of part-time students from low participation neighbourhoods in order to improve retention and student support initiatives. The project undertook innovative work to develop key writing skills. The first phase of the project focused on establishing the specific needs of the target groups, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of students' written work. The second phase aimed to identify effective means of supporting the writing development of students drawn from the target groups, including an analysis of the marking strategies employed by tutors, staff development sessions focusing on the assessment and support of students' writing skills, and implementing trials of new support materials.

13. Hereward College's project undertook research to discover what barriers students with disabilities encountered in accessing HE. The project has made a significant impact on the numbers of successful applications from students with disabilities onto HE courses, and in 2001-02 this represented a 350 per cent increase in students with high level support needs progressing to HE from the college.

Yorkshire and Humberside

14. The project led by Leeds Metropolitan University (LMU) titled 'Vocational, access and outreach progression mechanisms from FE to HE' comprised three inter-related core projects: vocational course progression; a joint project in educational guidance with the Open University; and the extension of the existing LMU Integrated Access Programme into areas of high social exclusion. Two senior staff from FE colleges were seconded to work on the project, which proved to be an excellent method of working on joint curriculum initiatives. LMU also appointed a manager for its institutional WP work, who worked closely with the managers of the project, providing a link between the institutions WP strategy work and the work of the project.

15. The Dance Pyramid was a two-year project led by the Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD). It involved a series of inter-related dance programmes and initiatives, which aimed to propel participants towards FE and HE provision at the NSCD or elsewhere. The project aimed to engage not only children/young people but also the parents, developing and maintaining relationships with them. The NSCD is based in the Chapeltown area of Leeds, one of the most deprived areas in the region with high levels of alienation and unemployment, and negative perceptions of the benefits of education. NSCD has traditionally attracted many local.students through its commitment to access and opportunity, and extensive 'grass roots' community work. The project made an excellent impact within the target group of young males, and the RAN was convinced that the value of the work could extend beyond dance to other valuable outcomes, including enhanced personal effectiveness and self-esteem.

16. The project led by the University of Leeds in collaboration with other HEIs in Yorkshire and Humberside was a good example of partnership. Sub-regional projects included investigating FE/HE progression; developing early application schemes; mentoring; raising aspirations through dance and developing a regional access framework. The project concluded with a regional dissemination event at the McAlpine Stadium in Huddersfield showcasing sub-regional projects' achievements. The impact of the project on practitioners has demonstrated the value of linking projects in order to share best practice and provide mutual support.

List of abbreviations

AoA	Action on Access
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
FE	Further education
FEC	Further education college
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
LEA	Local Education Authority
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
RAN	Regional Advisory Network
UCAS	Universities & Colleges Admissions Service

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